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Game Day Kaimin, February 19, 2000

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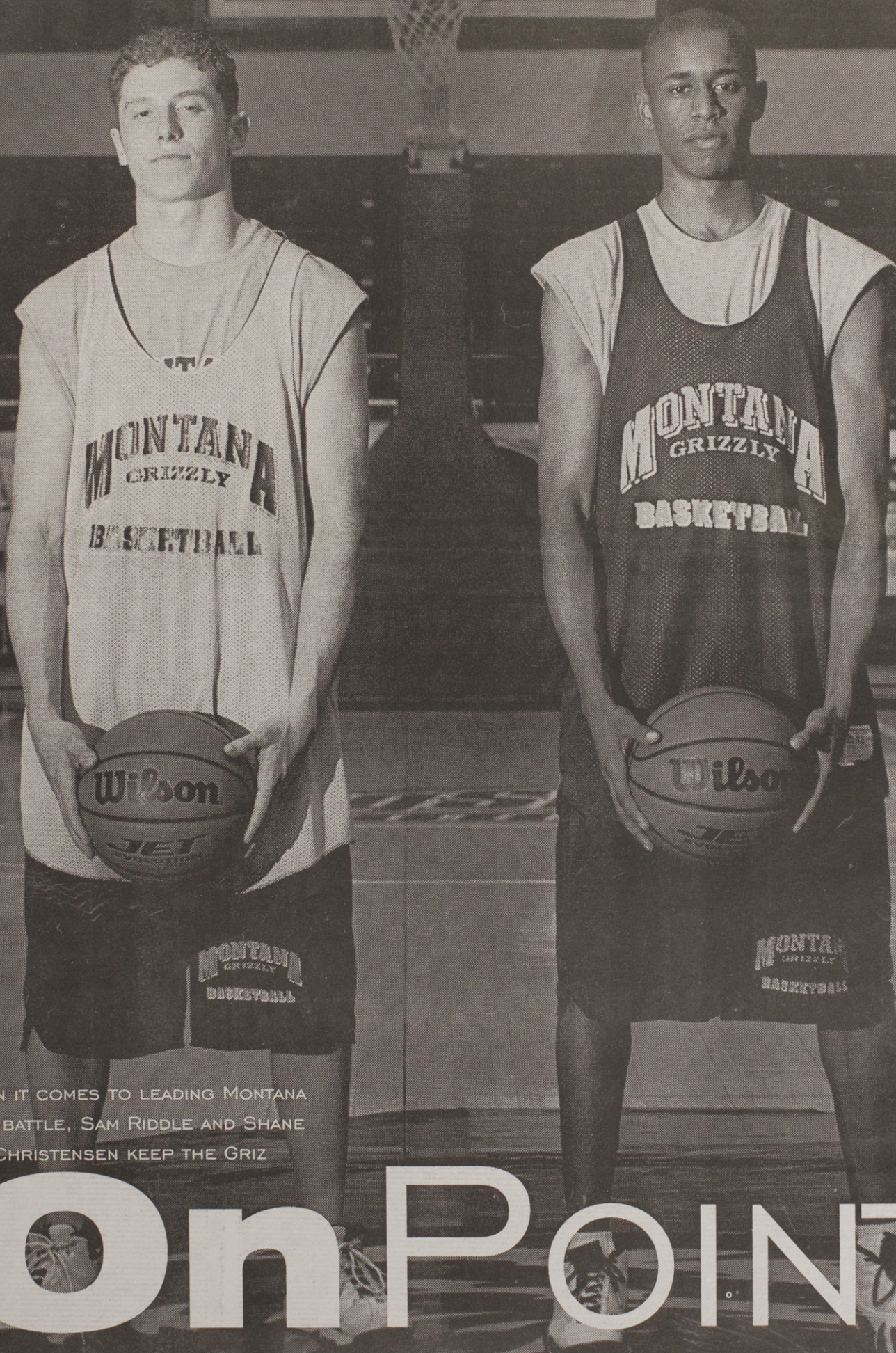
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GameDay KAIMIN



WHEN IT COMES TO LEADING MONTANA
INTO BATTLE, SAM RIDDLE AND SHANE
CHRISTENSEN KEEP THE GRIZ

On POINT

BY CHAD DUNDAS PAGE 2

John Locher/GDK

GRIZZLIES vs. Northern Arizona

On Point

THIS SEASON, AS UM'S YOUNG GUNS, SOPHOMORE SHANE CHRISTENSEN AND FRESHMAN SAM RIDDLE HAVE EXHIBITED BOTH THE PAINS OF GROWTH AND POISE BEYOND THEIR YEARS

BY CHAD DUNDAS

Late Tuesday afternoon I'm sitting courtside in the cavernous, empty Adams Center watching Sam Riddle and Shane "Scooter" Christensen play one-on-one. Practice is over and most of the team has already hit the showers, but the Grizzlies' two undersized point guards are still fresh.

A point of correction: They're not really that short. Although they look tiny when surrounded by teammates on the court, I notice with some consternation that Riddle and Christensen are both slightly taller than me.

And right now, even after two hours of drills and sprints, they seem to have unlimited energy. Or maybe they're showing off for the camera.

My photographer is also here, struggling to keep up with them, even though they're already moving at half speed, trying to give the shutter on his Nikon N90 a fighting chance.

Riddle is poised at the top of the key, hands casually flipping the ball against the floor, behind his back, between his legs. The rest of his body doesn't seem to notice. Scooter gives him a two-foot cushion, unfolding his enormous wingspan; his eyes keen and unblinking, his expression says 'bring it.' I'm silently hoping they both know this is just for laughs.

TOGETHER, THEY'VE GROWN AND MATURED AND, PERHAPS MOST IMPORTANTLY, THEY'VE BONDED.

"Jesus, Scooter, at least D him up if you're going to play him," hollers assistant coach Todd Schmautz, a wide smile making its way across his face.

"Nah, let's just have fun," Riddle says. "Everybody knows all we do all day is screw around."

They both laugh and so do I, because the statement seems so absurd. You want to understand these two? Know this: On a team with something to prove after its first losing season in 21 years, no one has been under more pressure and none have worked harder.

In early November, with its "comeback season" just two weeks away, the University of Montana men's basketball team was still without a point guard. The graduation of senior field general Cory Reiser and a season-ending injury to heir apparent Kyle Keyes had the Griz temporarily stalled in the worst kind of limbo.

Montana was left with two relatively untested young guards, sophomore Shane Christensen and true freshman Sam Riddle. Both were long on desire but short on experience. Both boasted impressive credentials: Christensen had played in 26 games for the Grizzlies last season but had started only one; Riddle had spent the past three years as the state's most exciting high school player. Neither had yet displayed the ability to lead a Division I basketball team on a consistent basis.

But could they learn? That's what coach Don Holst needed to know — and fast. If they couldn't, Montana had virtually no chance to compete in a league rich with talent. But would they blossom? The pieces were there, even if the only ones who believed it then were those in maroon and silver.

Finally, after toying with profoundly restructuring the team — moving forward Ryan Slider, also a sophomore, to the point — Holst reached a workable solution. The slightly older Christensen was given the starting job, but Riddle would see significant action off the bench. Both would bring different strengths to the lineup, providing the Griz with a potentially deadly, albeit experimental, tandem.

"They both offer such different things to the team," Holst said of his decision. "Shane's probably a little better scorer and Sammy is probably a little better with penetration and passing. It's nice, because if one of them is having an off night, I can bet that the other won't."

Since being anointed into their roles of shared leadership, the two underclassmen have both excelled and struggled while guiding the Grizzlies to their present position — a game out of first place in the Big Sky heading into the final weekend of home games. Together, they've grown and matured and, perhaps most importantly, they've bonded.

Christensen has been a ball of non-stop hustle since birth. His speed defines him as a basketball player — always moving, always darting in and out of defenses. He is far and away the Grizzlies' fastest player, and his energy reserves seem boundless. They don't call him Scooter for nothing.

Even at the age of five, when he mistook soccer for his favorite sport, Christensen knew his best asset was blistering speed. He now recalls that in those early forays into sport, he wasn't much for strategy.

"At that age, I didn't know if I had any skills," Christensen

said. "I would just go out there and run all day and never get tired. So my dad was like, let's just call him Scooter because he just runs and runs."

Soon Scooter found his true love and was terrorizing the ranks of Nevada high school basketball. By his senior season at Bishop Gorman High he had collected just about as many accolades as a prep-star possibly can: MacDonald's Pre-Season All-American, first-team All-State, a state championship, a member of the Las Vegas All Stars and "Mr. Gael" — the highest athletic award bestowed at BGHS.

Christensen acknowledges high school as an important component to his athletic life, but credits his experience in summer camps and all-star teams with really shaping him as a player. He specifically recalls training in the Seattle Supersonics' all-star summer program as providing him the support and confidence he needed to mature as a young player.

"As a kid," Christensen said, "I had the opportunity to play against guys like Gary Payton, Damon Stoudamire, Greg Anthony, Trajon Langdon. Big strong guys. I was doing my best to hold my own against those guys. That gets your adrenaline going. So now, when I step on the court I see a guy and I think, you're not Gary Payton, so go ahead."

Since coming to Montana, and even after winning the starting point guard job,

Scooter has kept a unusually low profile. His hushed demeanor and subdued attitude set him apart from the stereotype of his professional contemporaries as out-of-touch and inconsiderate. Still, those around him seem to fight against the public notion that he is shy or passive.

"Shane might be kind of quiet and introverted," Don Holst said. "But that doesn't mean he can't express himself. He's a very articulate, intelligent kid. He's very confident, just in a different way."

You might say he is no Sam Riddle.

"We have very different styles of play, everybody can see that," Christensen said. "We both play to our strengths and it seems to work well for the team."

If Christensen's laid-back ways serve to calm and control Montana in desperate times, then it is Riddle's outspoken excitement and fast pace that act as the perfect counterpart. Christensen, in fact, is quick to speak up when the subject is his freshman backup, whose reputation is for being anything but silent.

"I know people say Sam is a cocky guy," Christensen said. "But those people don't know him. When you really talk to him, he's just a guy with confidence. What basketball player doesn't have that? I have that also. I might not show it on my face, but you'll see it in my play."

Riddle is a performer, he can't help it. It runs in the family. His father was an original member of the Mission Mountain Wood Band. His parents encouraged his artistic growth his whole life. He sings. He plays piano. He defies gravity.

His is the most dangerous kind of athleticism, the kind you don't see coming. His slight build, short stature and freckled skin tones simply don't seem capable, at first glance, of the feats that have become indicative of his game. You just don't expect him to drive on you, shred your defense like cheddar and dunk on you.

Riddle etched his name into local sport lore by so dominating the competition at the high school level that some people thought he was aloof, arrogant. His game was an anomaly in the Western AA, which is traditionally known for its tough defense and well-disciplined offense. Riddle's sheer talent made his maverick tactics highly effective, and his confident swagger made him highly visible.

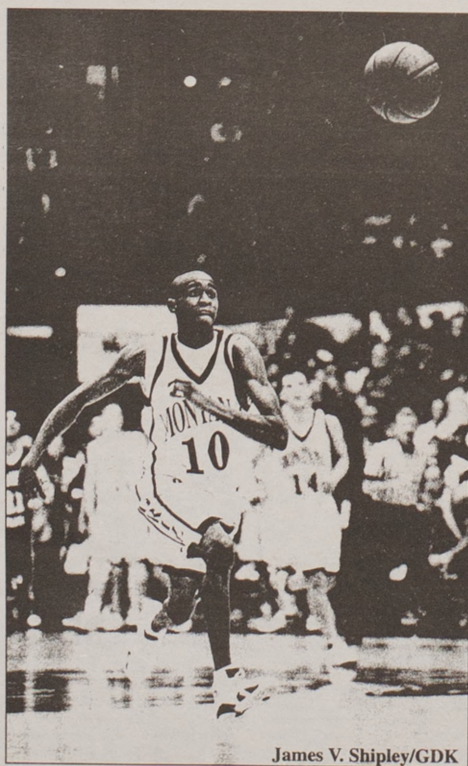
While he collected scoring titles and MVP awards, he also garnered more than his fair share of criticism, mostly from opposing players and their parents. There were also reported personality clashes with head coach Eric Hays, himself a UM alum, who took a decidedly more old-school approach to the game. But amid the pressure, Riddle continued to thrive, seemingly undaunted.

"People who have a negative opinion of me don't know me at all," he said. "If they see me make a nice move or a nice pass and then do a dance or something, all I'm doing is having fun. I'm just playing the game the way I think it should be played. I'm not trying to make anybody feel bad."

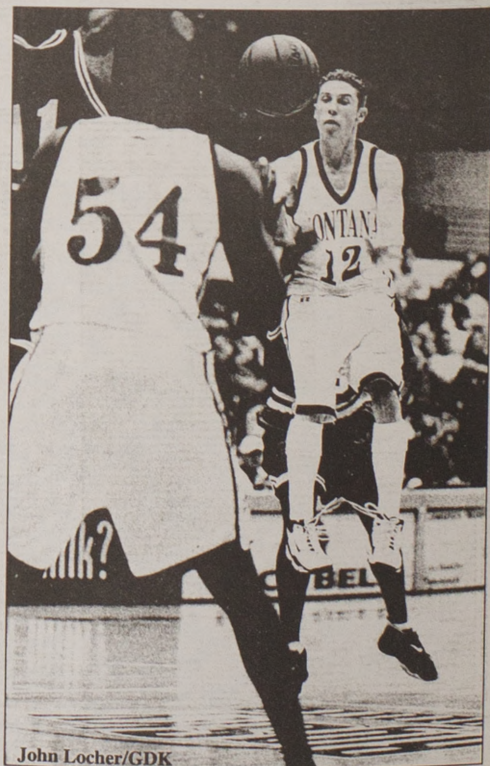
A number of larger, more prestigious colleges came calling upon his graduation, but Riddle eventually decided to stay in Montana. It was a choice that would keep him near the people he loved, but would also keep him in the sometimes unforgiving local spotlight.

"It was a really tough decision," he said. "But my family and my friends are here. It

CONTINUED ON PAGE 8



James V. Shipley/GDK



John Locher/GDK

Griz look to ambush Lumberjacks

Ryan Divish
Gameday Kaimin

If one doesn't get you, the other one will. Stop one, the other steps up. You just hope both don't get you at once.

The Big Sky Conference is filled with dynamite duos. But none are a more deadly an inside-outside combo than Northern Arizona's Ross Land and Dan McClintock. The two seniors lead the red hot Lumberjacks into the Adams Center to face an equally hot University of Montana men's basketball team Saturday with serious title implications on the line.

Land and McClintock account for almost half of the Jacks' 71 points per game and both rank in the top-10 of NAU's career scoring list. The two combined for 42 points in an 85-72 defeat of the Griz on Jan. 20.

Land, the conference player of the week, has been particularly hot. The 6-5 shooting guard has scored 69 points in NAU's last two games. He averages almost three three-point baskets per game and will be looking to exploit UM's 2-3 zone. Montana coach Don Holst said that in order to shut down NAU, the Griz must recognize where Land is on

the court at all times.

"They run a bunch of stuff for him," Holst said. "Against a zone, they're going to try get him off some baseline screens, and they even screen the top of the zone. And he's just lights out."

While Land is bombing away from the parking lot, McClintock is taking up real estate inside. The seven-footer gave the Grizzlies a ton of problems in Flagstaff, scoring 18 points with seven boards

and three blocked shots.

But NAU is not a two-man team.

"They're real solid," Holst said. "I expect they'll play real strong man-to-man defense and rebound. They're one of the better defensive teams in the conference."

UM leads the conference in three-point shooting at 40 percent a game and shot a scorching 77 percent (10-13) from behind the arc last weekend. They face a tough

test in the stingy Jack defense. NAU leads the conference in three-point field goal percentage defense, holding teams to less than 30 percent from behind the arc.

NAU's duo of Land and McClintock will lock horns with Montana's trio of Matt Williams, Mike Warhank and Jared Buckmaster. Williams has been the most consistent Grizzly and leads the team in both scoring and rebounding. The red-hot Buckmaster has

emerged as a major outside threat to go along with Warhank. The play of Montana's point guards has been strong of late. Shane Christensen and Sam Riddle have done a solid job splitting time at the point. Senior Dominique Davis is playing in his final home game — along with Warhank and Williams — unless, of course, Montana can win the regular season title and host the conference tournament.

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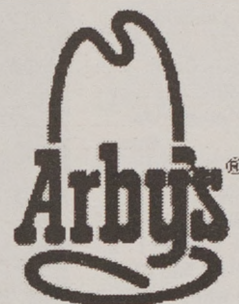
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Lumberjacks

Overhead at the
Probable Start

14 Adam Lopez Guard

Adam, NAU's point guard, is averaging a modest 8.3 ppg. Like Sen. John McCain, he hails from Arizona, but the similarities don't end there. Adam had a career high of 11 points against Western Carolina. McCain should have his own career high in South Carolina if he beats Bush Saturday. The point? Current events are everything, kids.

23 Ross Land Guard

Aside from having perhaps the dumbest haircut in the Big Sky Conference, Ross has been pretty boss, scoring 17.2 ppg. We're all about bad puns here at GDK, so when we say 3-point land has been "The Land of Ross," listen up. In his career, he's shot a ungodly 48 percent from downtown.

21 Cory Schwab Guard

Cory spent two years at a junior college, but was an honor roll student in high school. That means one of two things ... either he was soul searching or his game was sorry. His stay at Evergreen State fixed all. He's third on the team in scoring at 9 ppg.

32 Billy Hix Forward

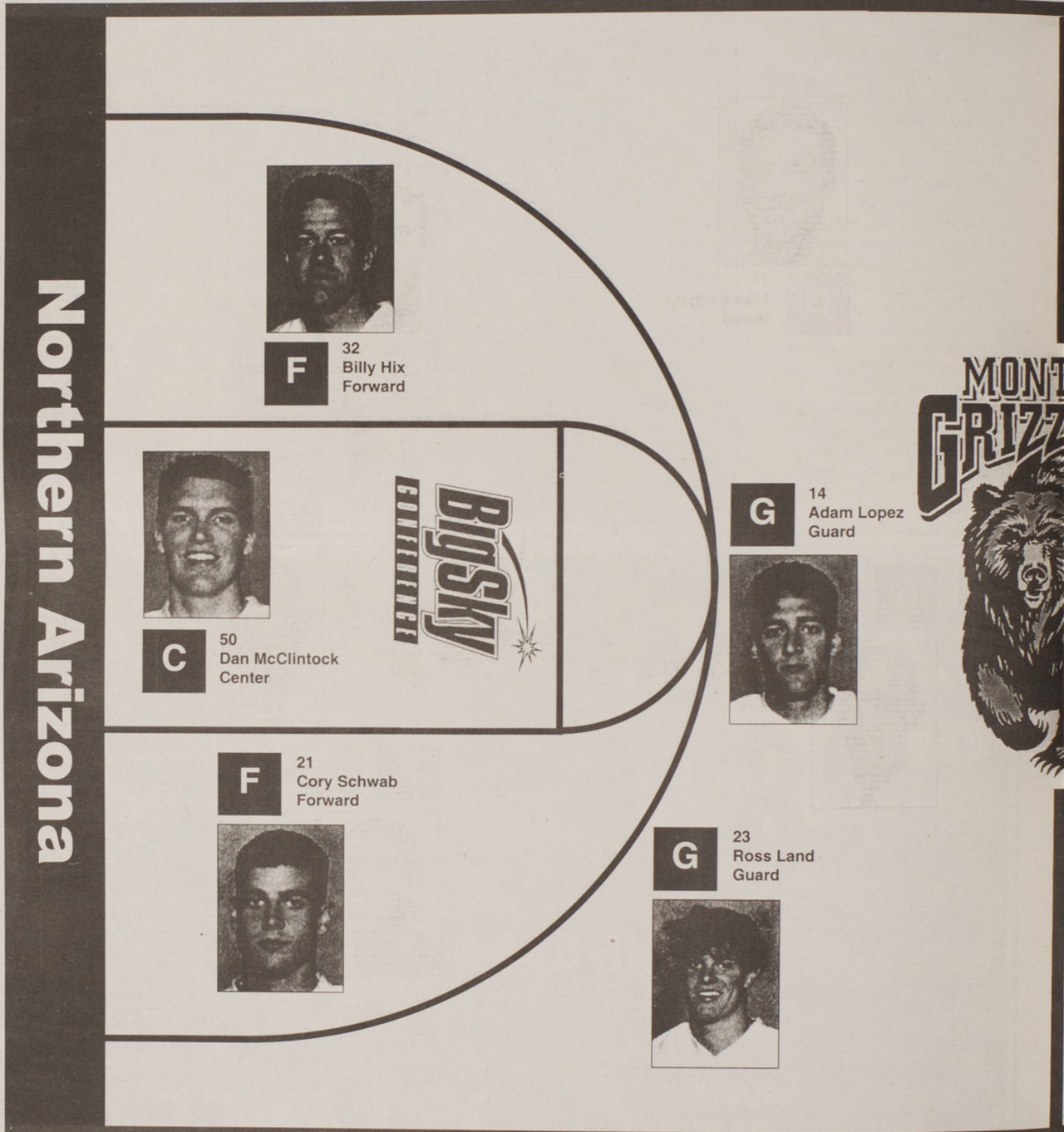
According to the NAU media guide, Billy is "the unsung hero" and "does all the little things" for NAU. He also "improves each year" and has "potential for a big play. That's all fine and good if you're Billy's parents, but all writers know that usually means you're a goofy white guy with no game. You go, Bill!

50 Dan McClintock Forward

Not only is Dan a pro prospect, but he's also a criminal justice major. That should come in handy if he sticks around Arizona since the NAU football team usually picks up a handful of "personal fouls" every summer. Dan scores at a 14.5 clip for the Jacks.

Head Coach: Mike Adras

Assistants: Chris Carlson
Dennis Cutts
Eugene Casaus



Northern Arizona				
4	Matthew Gebhart	G	6-4	So
12	Brian Holiday	G	5-10	Jr
14	Adam Lopez	G	6-0	So
21	Cory Schwab	F	6-5	Jr
22	Joel Rieck	F	6-6	So
23	Ross Land	G/F	6-5	Sr
24	Ryan Gerry	G	6-2	So
31	Ryan McDade	F	6-7	Fr
32	Billy Hix	F	6-7	Sr
33	Commander King	G	6-3	Jr
40	Andrew Wolthers	F/C	6-8	Sr
42	Casey Grundman	F/C	6-9	So
45	Kody Yazzie	F	6-3	Fr
50	Dan McClintock	C	7-0	Sr
52	Chris Bennett	C	6-9	Fr



31 Ryan McDade Forward

We're not really sure what to say about Ryan, except that he doesn't start and averages a little more than five points per game. If you consider that most of those points probably come in garbage time, you really are thinking too much about Ryan already.



Mike Adras Head Coach

First year coach Mike Adras' motto at NAU has been "recruit to shoot," which aside from sounding like the newest slogan from the boys at the NRA, has worked wonders. The Jacks are one of the best 3-point shooting clubs in the country.



Grizzlies

the Adams Center

Starting lineups



G 14 Mike Warhank Guard



F 33 Jared Buckmaster Forward

G 10 Shane Christensen Guard



C 54 Dominique Davis Center



F 50 Matt Williams Forward



Montana

10 Shane Christensen Guard

Coach Holst says that Christensen weighs as much as a chicken. The media guide puts him at 150 pounds. That's one big chicken. His mad skills and a knack to knock down the three under pressure makes him a shoe-in against any chicken.

14 Mike Warhank Guard

Mike might not go down into Grizzly folklore as the swiftest of athletes, but there's no doubt that the senior from Great Falls can shoot. Against Eastern Washington two years ago, Warhank set a school record with nine three pointers.

33 Jared Buckmaster Forward

The key to Buck's success might be in the knee-high socks. We haven't seen socks that high since junior soccer. But hey, if you're a 6-8 forward and you can hit the long ball, who cares.

54 Dominique Davis Center

Nique wants to be an elementary teacher. Will his kids be intimidated to see the 6-9 former center walk into their first grade classroom? Davis claims there's no need to be scared, because he'll do anything they do — from goofing around to watching cartoons.

50 Matt Williams Forward

Matt might be the top player in the Big Sky, but Williams won't take credit. He claims his success is because of his teammates. Maybe Harold Arceneaux at Weber State can learn a little something about humility from this Grizzly great. Or was Harold too busy getting schooled last Thursday?



Don Holst Head Coach
OK Big D, we've seen your tattoo, we've heard about your daughter's coaching tips, now what we really want to know is ... these days do you ever think about last year, sporting that now-famous mustache-toed grin, recall those "We Want Don" signs, and think, "Hey, doesn't everybody?"



12 Sam Riddle Guard
The Riddler keeps defenses guessing with his crazy moves and shifty passes. We love, we love it, can't get enough of it. NAU better keep on its toes if the Lumberjacks don't want to get cooked like a side of bacon by "White Chocolate."



52 Dan Carter Center
D.C. rooms with The Riddler, so you know that he's got some tricks up his sleeve. Don Holst said he does "Cadillac work," and while we're not quite sure what that means, we're pretty sure that we like it.

Head Coach: Don Holst

Assistants: Jim Sampson
Todd Schmautz
Larry Krystkowiak



Montana

3 Gary Lynch	G	6-3	Fr
10 Shane Christensen	G	6-1	So
12 Sam Riddle	G	6-0	Fr
14 Mike Warhank	G	6-3	Sr
22 Kyle Keyes	G	6-1	Sr
24 Brent Cummings	F	6-7	Fr
30 Zoran Milosavljevic	F-C	6-7	Jr
33 Jared Buckmaster	F	6-8	Jr
34 Ryan Slider	F	6-5	So
40 Travis Greenwalt	F	6-8	Jr
44 Mike Card	F	6-9	Fr
50 Matt Williams	F	6-7	Sr
52 Dan Carter	F-C	6-7	Jr
54 Dominique Davis	F	6-9	Sr

Around the Sky

THE WEEKLY REPORT OF NEWS AND HIGHLIGHTS
FROM THE BIG SKY CONFERENCE



It's never too early to look forward to the postseason

Ryan Divish
Gameday Kaimin

With the conference season drawing to a close, talk of postseason accolades has begun. While the races for conference **MVP** and **Coach of the Year** are up for grabs, Portland State's Ime Udoka has to be the odds-on favorite for conference **Newcomer of the Year**.

As of last week, Udoka was seventh in conference scoring at 14.7 points per game, fourth in rebounding, pulling down 7.2 rebounds a game, and fifth in steals with 1.57 per game.

A transfer from the University of San Francisco, the 6-7 Udoka returned home to the Portland area and has made a major impact with the Vikings this season, leading them in both scoring and rebounding.

However, Udoka sat out PSU's game against Eastern Washington with a strained back — a game that the Vikings narrowly lost 70-66. He also saw limited minutes in the two previous games. The

Vikings are in the middle of a five-game losing streak and desperately need Udoka's offensive productivity to get back on track. His status is questionable for the Vikings' games this weekend.

The race for **MVP** is still anyone's to win, but four players have emerged as frontrunners. Weber State's Harold Arceneaux and Eddie Gill, Northern Arizona's Ross Land and Montana's Matt Williams are all considered favorites for the honor.

Arceneaux, last year's league **MVP**, is currently leading the conference in scoring at 21.2 points per game and is seventh in rebounding. His teammate, Gill, is fifth in scoring at 16.6 a game and second in assists with 6.83 per game. But while the duo have flourished, the Wildcats have struggled with consistency all season.

No player has been hotter than NAU's Ross Land. The 6-5 senior scored 34 and 35 points in his last two outings and has led the Lumberjacks through their current six-game winning streak. On the season Land is averaging 17.2 points per

game and has netted 61 three-point shots.

Montana's Matt Williams has been the picture of consistency for the Grizzlies. He leads UM in both scoring and rebounding at 18.9 and 10.1 per game, respectively, and currently ranks second in scoring and first in rebounding in the Big Sky. Williams has reached double figures in points and rebounding ten times this season and has been the go-to guy for the Griz.

As his team's main offensive threat, the 6-7 Williams has been double-teamed, fouled, tormented and taunted by opposing teams this season. Head coach Don Holst said that he has been pleased to see Williams' unselfishness come through on the court, and added that Williams' ability to pass out of the double-team has increased the effectiveness of Griz shooters Mike Warhank and Jared Buckmaster.

The **Coach of the Year** award will likely go to the conference regular season winner. Both Steve Aggers of Eastern Washington and Don Holst of Montana will be given consideration. The Eagles

and the Grizzlies are enjoying successful turnaround seasons after sitting near the bottom of the league last year.

Aggers' Eagles were picked to finish fourth this season but have compiled an 8-2 record with four impressive road victories. The Eagles have combined depth, experience and unselfishness to lead the Big Sky, and much of the credit must go to Aggers, who has doled out minutes to ten different players.

The Grizzlies are in the middle of a six-game winning streak. Picked to finish sixth in the preseason, UM struggled early but has gelled into a quality team. It hasn't been easy for Holst. His projected starting point guard, Kyle Keyes, went down with an ACL injury and his first four players off the bench had played in a total of four Division I games prior to the season.

Portland State coach Joel Sobotka is also a candidate. His Vikings are playing well above the seventh-place finish predicted for them. If the Vikings make a late run, Sobotka will definitely be one to watch.

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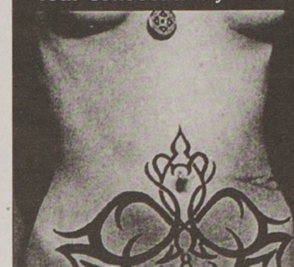
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On Point

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just felt like home here.”

Riddle himself admits that the pressures of the college game set him back at first. But he insists that it was his own apprehension, not the heightened exposure or increased skill level that was initially problematic.

“I’m happy now,” he said. “But I think I just recently started breaking through a mental block. I just figured I have to stop thinking so much and start playing like I know how to play. It’s just a matter of getting used to the system, I guess. I can adapt to any situation. (My teammates) have been great as far as not picking on me. I knew that I wasn’t going to come in and dominate right away, but I thought I would have a chance to be one of the better point guards in the league. I think you’re just starting to see glimpses of that now.”

Indeed, Riddle’s minutes have been steadily increasing throughout the season. His 23-minute, nine-assist outing against Weber State seemed to get him on track with the rest of the team, according to Holst.

“Sam’s starting to make a little move,” Holst said. “I think his last three weeks have made him a guy I can trust and bring in earlier in the game for longer periods of time.”

He also added that he feels that Riddle is playing beyond his years.

“He’s definitely ahead of where he should be right now, as a freshman,” Holst said. “I’m very pleased with him because he’s started to play as well as I thought he could his first year.”

Despite the fact that, on the surface, their personal-

ities seem to be in direct contrast, you get Riddle and Christensen together and they can become eerily similar. They often finish each other’s sentences, or just blurt out their responses to a question in unison.

“He’s like my brother on the team,” Riddle says. “Scooter and I know a lot about each other now. He’s probably the closest person to me on the team. He and I are just really good friends and I hope we stay that way for the rest of our lives.”

Riddle drives on Scooter and scores, then turns over the ball and Scooter does the same to him.

“We’re very competitive with each other at practice,” Scooter says. “We get out there and there isn’t anymore, ‘hey, how are you doing? What’s up?’ It’s more like, ‘it’s time to play.’ I go out and try to kill him and he tries to kill me, and that’s the way it should be. As soon as we step off the lines, we’re the best of friends.”

My photographer takes a break to replenish his film, but Christensen and Riddle don’t notice. They continue to launch drives and shots against one another’s half-hearted defense.

Having seen and heard enough to satisfy my own purposes, I get up and quietly make my exit out a side door.

Behind me, the game goes on.



EDITOR’S NOTE:

Game Day Kaimin is a free basketball program entirely put together by the staff of the Montana Kaimin, the student newspaper of the University of Montana. It’s students writing about students, and it’s completely free. If you have a suggestion or would just like to drop us a line, we’d appreciate it. Write me an e-mail (sportsscribe@yahoo.com) or call 243-4310. We’re listening.

—Kevin Van Valkenburg

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